

Koelreuteria paniculata – Golden Rain Tree

Native to China, the Golden Rain Tree is a deciduous tree reaching 10 to 12m in height with an equal spread. This is a very attractive specimen tree with attractive blooms and foliage, the foliage colour is purplish when unfolding and turning a bright green in Summer and yellow in the Autumn. The showy, highly attractive flowers are yellow and appear in Summer in large panicles. The fruit that follows is a papery capsule that resembles a Chinese lantern.

At maturity, the tree has a rounded crown with a spread equal to or greater than the height and has compound leaves that give it an overall lacy appearance. The leaves turn yellow before falling from the tree.

The bark is light gray-brown and becomes furrowed with age.

Golden Rain Tree is perhaps most striking in the autumn with its large clusters of showy yellow flowers. These are followed by 5cm reddish purple seed pods, which are equally as dramatic! The fruit is a papery three-compartment, bladder-like structure full of seeds, in warm climates seed is produced in great quantities and there are always seedlings beneath a mother tree so the tree can be invasive under these conditions and care must be taken to not allow the seedlings to get out of control. The Golden Rain Tree is best grown in cooler zones where the shorter growing season prevents formation of seed.

Golden Rain Tree is quite adaptable to most soil conditions. It does best in loose, well drained soil with good watering, especially when young. It tolerates drought, alkaline soil, heat, wind, and air pollution. Prune crossing branches as needed during winter when dormant.

A good sunny position is required for best flowering and fruiting. In cooler climates, use it as a free-standing feature tree where it can be seen in all its glory. Golden Rain Tree is fast growing and can produce welcome shade and beauty for new homes in quick order. The cheerful, bright yellow flowers are delightful and are followed by the attractive ornamental seed pods.

Propagation

Koelreuteria seed will not generally break their dormancy unless exposed to a period of low temperature and moist conditions known as stratification possibly recreating the circumstances of a cold northern winter. This period of "chilling" or stratification can be accomplished first soaking the seed for 24 hours and then by placing seed in a moist, sterile (pasteurised) growing medium, such as a mix of equal parts clean sand and peat or sphagnum peat moss, in a plastic bag or disinfected container.

Enclose the container in a tightly sealed plastic bag and place it in the crisper section of the refrigerator for four to six weeks. Towards the end of the stratification period seeds

may start to sprout. Seeds are then separated from the stratification medium and germinated at 17 to 22°C.

Sow seed in a good quality seed raising mix. Seed should be covered to about twice their length. Maintain the media in a moist but not damp state.

When large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on until they are 20cm or more tall before planting them out in their permanent positions.

